

Message Text

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PAGE 01 EDINBU 00173 181511Z

73

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 FEA-01 ERDA-07 AID-05 CEA-01 CIAE-00

CIEP-02 COME-00 DODE-00 EB-07 FPC-01 H-02 INR-07

INT-05 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 OMB-01 PM-03 USIA-15

SAM-01 OES-05 SP-02 SS-15 STR-04 TRSE-00 FRB-01

LAB-04 SIL-01 PA-02 PRS-01 /114 W
----- 114223

R 181413Z JUL 75

FM AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

TO AMEMBASSY LONDON

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 845

UNCLAS EDINBURGH 173

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: UK, ENRG, ETRD

SUBJECT: BENN VISITS NORTH SEA OIL AREAS

INCLUDED IN SEC STATE FOR ENERGY BENN'S TWO-DAY VISIT TO OIL AREAS IN SCOTLAND JULY 16 - 17 WAS TEXACO'S ABERDEEN SUPPLY BASE. SUBSEQUENTLY, JIM BARBER, TEXACO MANAGER, TOLD ME THE FOLLOWING:-

A) CUT-BACK: BENN ASKED WHY TEXACO HAD CUT BACK FROM 4 TO 2 RIGS AND WAS TOLD THAT THE COMPANY WAS SUFFERING FROM THE SAME BUDGET PROBLEMS WHICH AFFECTED OTHERS, INCLUDING HMG. HOWEVER, TEXACO CONSIDERED ITS NORTH SEA PROPERTIES THE BEST PROSPECTS IT HAD AND WOULD MOVE SWIFTLY TO DEVELOP PROVED FIELDS.

B) DELAYS: WHEN BENN ASKED IF THE COMPANY HAD SUFFERED DELAYS FROM STRIKES, BARBER SAID "NO BUT WE'VE BEEN PRETTY SCARED." IT SEEMED UNFAIR FOR THE INDUSTRY TO BE TARGETED IN DISPUTES BETWEEN NON-RELATED INTERESTS, I.E., FISHING BOAT BLOCKADE. BENN AGREED.

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PAGE 02 EDINBU 00173 181511Z

C) UNIONIZATION: WHEN BENN ASKED FOR THE COMPANY POSITION ON

UNIONS, HE WAS TOLD THAT THE COMPANY ADHERED TO ALL APPLICABLE UK LAWS AND REGULATIONS, THAT THE COMPANY CONSIDERED THE MATTER OF UNIONIZATION ONE FOR THE FREE CHOICE OF THE WORKERS THEMSELVES, THAT TO DATE ONLY ONE OR TWO OUT OF 78 ON A RIG SEEMED TO WANT UNIONIZATION, THAT THE WORST THING THAT COULD HAPPEN TO NORTH SEA OIL DEVELOPMENT WOULD BE TO HAVE MULTIPLE UNIONS INVOLVED IN OFFSHORE OPERATIONS. BENN STATED THAT HE HAD DISCUSSED THIS LATTER PROBLEM AT LENGTH AT THE INTER-UNION OFFSHORE COMMITTEE THE PREVIOUS EVENING AND ENCOUNTERED THE SAME REASONING, I.E., ONE UNION WAS PREFERABLE TO SEVERAL.

D) BUY BRITISH: BENN WAS IMPRESSED BY THE FACT THAT TEXACO'S SMALL SHOP HAD A FULL-TIME EXPERT WHOSE ONLY JOB WAS TO SCOUT OUT ALL POTENTIAL UK SUPPLIERS OF OIL FIELD EQUIPMENT. TO DATE UK PRESSURES HAD NOT CAUSED DAMAGE (STATE 202255), BUT WERE GETTING MORE INTENSE.

E) SAFETY: WHEN BENN MENTIONED HIS CONCERN OVER UNREPORTED ACCIDENTS AND INJURIES, HE WAS TOLD THAT TEXACO FULLY ADHERED TO EXISTING UK REGULATIONS REQUIRING THAT ALL ACCIDENTS, INJURIES AND LOST TIME TO BE REPORTED, THAT IF THESE REPORTS WERE NOT AVAILABLE TO THE MINISTER, TEXACO WOULD SEND HIM DUPLICATES. BENN SEEMED SURPRISED.

F) IMPRESSION: BARBER WAS MOST IMPRESSED BY THE CHARM, BRAINS AND ABILITY OF THE NEW SEC OF STATE FOR ENERGY AND WONDERED HOW THESE EXCEPTIONAL TALENTS WOULD BE USED IN NORTH SEA DEVELOPMENT. GOOD QUESTION.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: VISITS, OIL FIELDS, LABOR UNIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 18 JUL 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: n/a
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 JAN 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975EDINBU00173
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750249-0658
From: EDINBURGH
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750739/aaaabisu.tel
Line Count: 91
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: greeneet
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 13 JAN 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <13 JAN 2003 by ThomasVJ>; APPROVED <15 MAR 2004 by greeneet>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: BENN VISITS NORTH SEA OIL AREAS INCLUDED IN SEC STATE FOR ENERGY BENN'S TWO-DAY VISIT TO OIL
TAGS: ENRG, ETRD, EIND, UK, (BENN)
To: LONDON
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006